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Senate Bill 371

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Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee.

My name is Bill Squires, and I work for Blackfoot Telecommunications in Missoula. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today in support of Senate Bill 371. I want to thank the sponsor for brining this legislation forward, as I believe it is critical to very fundamentals of how we, as Montanans, want to be treated as employees, and how my company, as a local employer of 160 hard working men and women, want to treat our employees.

Our company is one of the real life "stories" that led to this legislation. One of our employees went home during a break to let her dog out to do his dog business. While returning to our office, this employee was involved in a car accident. Despite the undisputed fact that this employee was doing her own business or the dog's business as the case may be, this accident became a workers' comp case, and she was granted benefits. Quite frankly, that just defies logic. As the employer, we did not ask or even

suggest that this person go take care of her dog business. Yet, as an employer, we are held liable for her accident under current work comp authority.

We take great pride in promoting wellness in our company. Several years ago we became self-insured for medical coverage. We provide top of the line health coverage to our employees, and they have responded by taking a sincere interest in seeing our self-funded plan succeed. Every day the majority of our employees walk on their breaks. Some run errands such as dry cleaning, etc. so they can get home to their families after work. We not only allow this, we promote it! However, the suggestion from some opponents to this bill is to simply not allow employees to leave our buildings on breaks. That simply is not the kind of employer we want to be. However, if this bill is not passed, we will be forced to give serious consideration to doing exactly that. I don't like that idea, and I know our 160 employees won't like it.

I very much believe in the work comp system, and gladly pay our premiums to make sure our employees are covered if there is an accident on the job. We want them, and their families, to have some security. However, that doesn't mean that we should become the "be all, end all" insurer of our employees when they are doing their own business. This is just simply a common sense bill. If you are doing your own business – or your dog's business – you are not acting for your employer, and us employers should not have responsibility for their actions.

I encourage you to pass this bill out of committee with a "Do Pass" recommendation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I would be very happy to address any questions you may have.